



HOUSE
BUDGET
COMMITTEE

Budget Digest

Chairman Steve Womack

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THE TROUBLED HISTORY OF APPROPRIATIONS

One of the visible signs that the budget and appropriations process is broken and badly in need of reform is seen in the track record of appropriations consideration in Congress and the frequent reliance on short-term funding measures known as continuing resolutions. Members of the Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform have expressed interest in additional mechanisms to motivate Congress to complete budget and appropriations work on time.

SIGNS OF PROBLEM

- **Operating by Irregular Order:** Congress has not followed regular order regarding the congressional budget and appropriations process since fiscal year 1995, the last time Congress passed a budget conference agreement followed by all separate appropriations bills before the beginning of the upcoming fiscal year. Congress still regularly experiences delays even when topline discretionary funding levels are agreed to well before the start of the fiscal year.
- **Buying Time with Continuing Resolutions:** Continuing resolutions (CRs) have become the norm for the Federal Government's funding stream. Not only do they mark a failure of the Congress to complete its work on time, but CRs are extremely harmful on multiple levels throughout the executive branch, particularly for the Department of Defense where they disrupt everything from weapons development to military pay.
- **Scrambling to Prevent Shutdowns:** The Budget Act does not provide a mechanism for enforcing the timeline, and therefore, deadlines are often missed. As a result, Congress frequently relies on continuing resolutions, causing uncertainty about government spending or raising the threat of a shutdown. Between 1977-2017, Congress enacted 176 continuing resolutions – averaging more than four CRs each year for the past four decades.
- **Experiencing Actual Shutdowns:** Since 1977, Congress has shut down the Federal Government 19 times. Whether it is federal employees being furloughed, national parks being shuttered, or crucial national security functions being limited, shutdowns inflict damage and uncertainty on the economy. For example, the 16-day shutdown in October 2013 resulted in a \$24 billion hit to the American economy and, according to the Office of Management and Budget, cost the Federal Government an additional \$2 billion to reopen its doors.

THE NEED FOR REFORM

"I personally believe there is no higher calling right now for the United States Congress than to finally face up to the failure of this Budget Act of 1974, take a clean page approach, and finally, once and for all, develop a politically neutral platform that allows us to fund the government on time without all this drama and without creating crisis for the rest of the world regarding what are we going to do in terms of funding the federal government the next year."

- Senator David Perdue
April 17, 2018, Hearing Remarks

"Congress has excelled over and over again taking the path of least resistance. We have had, I think by my count, roughly 39 continuing resolutions since I became a member of the United States Senate."

- Senator Michael Bennet
April 17, 2018, Hearing Remarks

"We have clear issues that we continue to face with the deadlines and the structure as it exists. Eighteen of the past 20 years, we have had an omnibus bill. We are not even trying to be able to go through the process."

- Senator James Lankford
April 17, 2018, Hearing Remarks